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ABSTRACT

The political economy program at Williams College is described. This program is a joint major drawing upon the political science and economics departments and is designed to give those who enter public service, business or law a grasp of the governmental and economic environment within which they will have to operate. It also may give those who continue in academic work an opportunity to make the interdependence of political and economic forces the foundation of their more advanced studies. The required courses in economics and political science are described. Financial assistance has been offered for students who wish to work in an internship position related to public policy-making. Placements have included international organizations, research with government departments or interest groups, positions under political officeholders, and social or political action organizations. Requirements for participating in the honors thesis program in political economy are specified. Students who have completed the political economy program in the past have customarily entered law schools, business and business administration programs, public and international policy programs, interest groups, public service, politics, teaching, graduate schools of economics or political science, and research organizations. (SW)

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The Political Economy Program: An Informal Guide

Williams College
1979

1. The Curriculum

The Political Economy Program has been a distinct part of the Williams curriculum since 1946. It is a joint major drawing upon the Political Science and Economics departments, which seeks to bring together the approaches of both disciplines for analysis of issues of political economic change and policy making. The faculty members directly involved in the program bring to it not only a special interest in this interdisciplinary approach but also a considerable range of relevant experience.

The major seeks to surmount the sometimes artificial barriers of specialization that may characterize either discipline taken by itself. It is designed to give those who enter public service, business or law a grasp of the governmental and economic environment within which they will have to operate; and to give those who continue in academic work an opportunity to make the interdependence of political and economic forces the foundation of their more advanced studies.

The present requirements of the major include three basic courses in Economics and three basic courses in Political Science, which are also specific requirements for students majoring in those two fields. Thus Political Economy students are expected to have a command of basics in economics and political analysis similar to that of students majoring in the separate fields. They must also take two courses which provide a foundation for the two senior political economy courses (P.E. 401-402) which are taught jointly by a political

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scientist and an economist. In the junior year, students experience Pol.Econ. 301, the first team-taught course, which examines alternative analytical frameworks associated with the great names of Smith, Marx, and Mill, and explores how these frameworks affect what an analyst sees in current issues, such as education policy. Then, in the senior year the two culminating courses examine the problems confronting public policymakers in both the international and domestic contexts. Pol.Econ. 401 examines the interaction of political and economic concerns in contemporary international relations, particularly among the industrialized democracies in North America, Europe, and the Pacific, and in their relations with developing countries. Pol.Econ. 402 has as its central feature preparation by student committees of public policy reports and recommendations regarding current domestic issues, e.g. national health insurance. This course includes a subsidized 3-day visit to Washington, D.C., or other relevant locales, during spring vacation, for interviews with government agencies, interest groups and research organizations. The policy study groups defend their final recommendations in public sessions.

Starting with the class of 1981, two courses will be required as background for the senior Political Economy courses. These will deal with international trade and with policy-making processes in the United States. Students must take, preferably <u>before</u> Pol.Econ. 401:

	Economics 358	International Economics
or	Economics 360	Studies in International Trade and Finance;

and preferably <u>prior</u> to Political Economy 402:

	Pol.Sci. 212	The Legislative Process
or	Pol.Sci. 214	The Presidency and Congress
or	Pol.Sci. 216	Public Policy in Urban Politics
or	Pol.Econ. 302	Public Policymaking in the U.S.

No elective courses will be required in the Political Economy major (starting with the class of '81), but most students will probably find themselves attracted to additional courses in either the contributing departments, or related areas (e.g. ethics, technology, environment). Two non-required courses in the curriculum are labeled Political Economy (302 and 304), and deal with both political science and economics concepts and reading materials. They are offered during the semester following Pol.Econ. 301, which is an appropriate time to consider them.

2. Internships

Since 1978, with the help of a grant from the Sloan Foundation, Political Economy has been able to offer financial assistance to its major students who wish to work in an internship position related to public policymaking. The grants have been pegged to the amount afforded under the Mead Fund internship program, minus earnings in most cases where the employer is able to pay the student employee. These grants are normally awarded at the end of the junior year, for summer employment. Any junior Political Economy major is eligible, so long as his/her job is public-policy-related. In 1978, two students worked in international organizations, six in research positions in government departments or interest groups, five in staff positions under political office holders, and three in social or political action organizations pushing for new public policies. The interns worked at the international, national, state, municipal, and county levels of political organization. They were provided with grants up to $800 for a minimum of six weeks internship. Each intern is required to submit a written report on his experience when he returns to the campus. No academic credit is given for the intern work, but we expect to

reap the benefits during the senior year courses as students refer back to their practical experience in public policy agencies.

3. The Degree with Honors

The degree with Honors in Political Economy may be obtained solely via the writing of a thesis. Since Pol.Econ. 402 involves all senior major students in a demanding public policy study project in their spring semester, seniors wishing to achieve Honors must take the honors thesis course (Pol.Econ. 493) during the fall semester and Winter Study Period. A necessary component of such an honors thesis program is an elective course in Political Science or Economics, taken during the junior year. This course should be closely related, indeed, should prepare the ground for the honors thesis.

A junior major who has a strong academic record in the program and wishes to apply for the honors thesis should first seek to define sharply the objective, methodology, and sources of the proposed research. The topic may not be rooted exclusively in either economics or political science. Preparing a preliminary draft of a two-page prospectus is a very desirable first step. The draft should also indicate the preparation the student has received or is receiving in an elective course in economics or political science, and describe the anticipated form of final presentation of the thesis. An essay type of presentation would ordinarily not run more than seventy-five pages. The student should discuss the draft with at least one member of either department, and seek to interest at least one faculty member in being an adviser for the project.

A two-page prospectus should be submitted to the Political Economy Chairman at least ten days before the start of spring registration. After review by a

committee, the Chairman will advise a student before spring registration whether his or her candidacy for Honors has been accepted, whether the proposed topic has been approved, and who will serve as the thesis adviser.

To achieve the degree with honors in Political Economy the thesis must be completed by the end of Winter Study Period and be judged of honors quality by the Adviser and a second reader, chosen so that both departments in the program are represented. A thesis which is judged to be of particular distinction will qualify its author for the degree with highest honors.

4. Conclusion

The Political Economy major is demanding in that it attempts to wed two distinct intellectual disciplines, and it specifies eleven courses which must be completed. This is a challenging undertaking, and it depends on a rapid accumulation of basic courses in each discipline. Students who wish to study abroad, or to pursue coordinate programs (e.g. Environmental Studies, or Area Studies) will find their course options rather constrained, and should seek advice early from the program chairman.

Students who have completed the program in the past have customarily entered law schools, business, and business administration programs, public and international policy programs, interest groups, public service, politics, teaching, graduate schools of economics or political science, and research organizations.